

Impact of Drought And Poor Wheat Harvest In Kansas

The Kansas wheat harvest may be one of the worst on record — and the loss doesn't just hurt Kansas, according to a Kansas State University expert.

"The rains came too late to benefit the wheat production, so we may have our lowest wheat harvest on record," said Mary Knapp, service climatologist in the university's agronomy department.

That isn't just disappointing for Kansas farmers, but could affect other food availability and the overall economy. Drought conditions lead to poor pasture conditions and hay production, which then impacts the number of cattle ranchers can graze, Knapp said.

"Then it starts trickling into the community because if you have wheat farmers with very low production, they most likely also received very low income," Knapp said. "That farmer is not going to invest in machine upgrades or make as many purchases in the community. That will cause the economy to drag, which may result in a ripple effect that can be far reaching."

Knapp says it takes about as long to recover from a drought as it did to reach drought status, so if it has been three years in the making, it will take three years or more to recover from the drought effects. And even getting more rain may not improve drought status.

"You can have a drought punctuated by a flood and still be in a drought," Knapp said. "If the rain comes too quickly, it doesn't have a beneficial component."